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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001018

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DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS, S/CT, SA/PD; NSC FOR E.  
MILLARD  
LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [CE](#) [JA](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Despite some Opposition criticism, the Tokyo conference continues to generate a positive reaction

Refs: (A) Tokyo 3766 (Notal)

- (B) Tokyo 3765 (Notal)  
- (C) Colombo 1008, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills.  
Reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Tokyo donors conference continues to generate a positive reaction in Sri Lanka. The president maintains a studied silence, however, despite some criticism of the conference by her party. The Tamil Tigers, who controversially did not go to Tokyo, have also been mum, thus far. There are reports that the Japanese plan to meet with the Tigers soon. Overall, there is a very warm glow about Tokyo in Sri Lanka, but the Tigers remain a wildcard. END SUMMARY.

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Continued Positive Reaction to Tokyo  
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2. (SBU) Media reaction in Sri Lanka to the Tokyo donors conference generally continues to be very positive (except for one key exception -- see Paras 3-4). Local English-language and vernacular (Sinhala and Tamil) newspaper coverage focused heavily on Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's closing remarks, which were very laudatory of the international community. The papers also highlighted the "Tokyo Declaration on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka," which was issued June 10. The Tamil-language press was a bit less upbeat regarding the conference's outcome, expressing some anxiety as to whether the north/east would truly benefit from the understandings reached at Tokyo. Amid the upbeat tone, there was also some press to the effect that many of the assistance pledges for Sri Lanka were contingent on the peace process's moving forward. (Note: See Ref C for local media and political reaction to the first day of the June 9-10 conference. See our media reaction cable for a more detailed review of June 11 press play.)

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President's Party ridicules Tokyo outcome  
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3. (C) The one major area where media coverage struck a bit of a down note involved remarks made by the key Opposition party. In June 10 comments that received considerable press attention, People's Alliance (PA) party spokesman Dr. Sarath Amunugama called the USD 4.5 billion in pledges made at Tokyo by donors "a huge debt trap...We are certainly not approving this mad rush to get money." (Note: The PA is led by President Kumaratunga, who shares a very tense cohabitation relationship with the PM and the GSL.) Among his other tart comments, Amunugama went on to assert that the majority of the donor funds consisted of loans, not grants, for which "the total GDP of this country will not be enough to repay the annual installments."

4. (C) When asked about Amunugama's remarks, presidential advisor Eric Fernando -- a bit defensively -- told us that it was "the right of the Opposition" to criticize the government in power. Saying that he (Fernando) was speaking as a private Sri Lankan citizen, however, Fernando added that he was gratified with the international community's faith in the peace process as exemplified by the efforts made at Tokyo.

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President Still Mum  
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5. (C) Despite the fact that her party is piping off, President Kumaratunga continues to maintain an almost studied silence regarding the Tokyo conference. Fernando, the presidential adviser mentioned above, told

us that he was not sure when or if the president would have a direct comment re Tokyo. Noting that many speakers at Tokyo, including the PM and the Deputy Secretary, had praised the president, Fernando felt that

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there was little room left for the president to respond. Given the president's considerable history and experience of dealing with the Tigers, however, Fernando thought an "I told you so" was the only comment left unsaid by Kumaratunga. (Note: In saying this, Fernando was referring to the fact that the Tigers had controversially not attended the conference and have been in a difficult mood of late. The president has long been a skeptic toward Tiger involvement in the peace process.) In responding to press reports that the president and prime minister plan to meet soon to discuss the outcome of the conference, Fernando remarked that he anticipated such a meeting, but was not aware of a specific timeframe. (Note: Per Ref C, the president reportedly decided not to meet with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe before he left for the conference last week. The PM apparently did meet with her key foreign policy adviser, Lakshman Kadirgamar, however.)

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Japanese Reportedly set to Brief the Tigers  
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16. (C) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization has also not publicly reacted to Tokyo as of late June 11. (Note: The Tigers usually issue their political statements by posting them on "TamilNet." While this pro-LTTE website has carried some reports re Tokyo, including the full text of the Deputy Secretary's opening remarks, it has not commented directly on the conference.) There are some press reports, however, that the Japanese plan to brief the Tigers on the conference's outcome. According to these reports, Japanese special envoy Yasushi Akashi plans to travel to London for talks with LTTE chief negotiator Anton Balasingham soon. In the meantime, the Japanese ambassador to Sri Lanka is reportedly slated to meet with the Tigers in the LTTE-controlled Wanni region in northern Sri Lanka. When asked, Japanese and Norwegian Embassy contacts, and the government's Peace Secretariat, could not confirm these reports.

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(Note: Ref B flagged the possibility of the Japanese ambassador's visit to the Wanni, however.)

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Overall, there is a very warm glow about Tokyo in Sri Lanka. Many contacts feel that the conference has bolstered the prime minister's position back home, for example, making it easier for him to move forward on the peace track. All that said, there are real questions as to what the Tigers are thinking. Since they pulled out of the peace talks in late April, the Tigers have been in a truculent, disruptive mood. As the group digests what happened in Tokyo, it appears the LTTE has a real chance to re-engage. Whether it will take that chance, remains very unclear. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS